



YOONHEE CHOI

wythe

FRONT OF HOUSE

PREFACE

YIANNI DOULIS, *Architect and JHID Collaborator*

Grids and color blocks will always find a soft spot in my flinty heart. Cases of embroidery thread in a well-managed sewing shop, subtle shading in the surface of a naturally fired brick wall, the block plan of a flat American city. "wythe", Yoonhee Choi's installation at the Front of House Gallery, borrows something from the pleasure of each of these, while offering us something particular.

Choi's educational path passed from urban planning through architecture to art, a small fact that brings aspects of her work into focus. The choice of a brick as the module of expression is at once the choice of an artist reacting to the texture of a space, an architect's love of gravity expressed in material, and the object of an urbanist's desire for the fundamental unit of city building.

Artists name their work to distract us strategically, and "wythe," the term for a single thickness of brick within a masonry wall, is no different. Most of the installation is explicitly thin, and the artist's choice of material is teasingly unmasonry-like. Part of its interest lies in the way thinness is layered up to create depth, in the shadows cast on one side of the installation, and in these laminations stacked into a mass on the other.

But it's no accident that the unit of color Choi chooses to pick out isn't the long side of a standard brick but its shorter end. In structural brick walls, this end is a full brick turned inward and used to span between the two wythes of a typical wall, binding them together. It's the surface treatment and can be decorative, but it's also suggestive of what's behind the surface, of the deeper structure involved.

In a similar way, the paper pulp used has a generic quality to it, but in fact is made of cotton from Choi's parents' marriage futon; and the primary colors chosen, besides being hypnotically vibrant, are symbolic of the cardinal points in traditional Korean cosmology. While neither of these hidden elements are essential to appreciating the work, they may serve as confirmation that there is a personal and emotionally resonant aspect to the work that adds to its appeal.

ARTIST BIOGRAPHY

Educated as a city planner, an architect, and an artist, Yoonhee Choi's work explores the potentials of unexpected materials to express both multiple scales of spatial experience and intimate, personal associations. In her projects, which range from tiny collages to drawings on paper to room-size installations, she uses everyday materials in an improvisational manner to search for limits and possibilities, seeking to discover new compositional devices and structures. Her work has been exhibited across the country and is part of collections on both coasts.

Choi studied art at the School of the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston, architecture at Yale University, and city planning at Hong-ik University in Seoul. She is the recent recipient of a Golden Spot Residency Award from the Crow's Shadow Institute of the Arts, a Jordan Schnitzer Printmaking Residency from the Sitka Center for Art and Ecology, and a Papermaking Residency from c3:initiative.



ARTIST STATEMENT

From my first visit to the Front of House space I was irresistibly drawn to the exposed brick walls.

Row upon row of individual stacked bricks are quietly visible above and beyond the white gallery walls, pulling my eye up to the high ceiling and back to through to the entire length of the office space.

Brick masonry is such a powerful, straightforward, basic building system: masons stacking individual small blocks, course by course, each handmade and unique, with mortar as the binder that both holds the blocks together and fills and seals the irregular gaps between them.

The dimension of a single brick gives a human scale to this space. Stacked together, the bricks standing as a wall provide a scale to the history of this space. The patina of aging and the trace of past events are engraved into this surface: chipped edges, stained surfaces, layers of previous paint, the ghostly silhouette of stairs that have been removed.

I have recently been working with paper pulp, fascinated by its expressive possibilities in both two- and three-dimensions. I saw this project was an opportunity to explore the potential of this versatile material to resonate with the distinctive character of the Front of House.

The candid beauty and power of the brick wall inspired my project and remained my reference throughout my speculative and experimental process

This work, wythe, is a three-dimensional diptych in celebration and contemplation of this 19th century space.



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